

POLITICS AS USUAL: Public Agendas?

By Alison Collins-Mrakas

Do you think politicians should provide a minute-by-minute accounting of their day, like a lawyer submitting a bill?

This thought jumped out at me the other day while watching American news and they were talking about the president's daily schedule. I don't recall the issue but what did stick out for me was that the president's schedule was public at all. The security issues public scheduling presents would seem insurmountable. I don't think the secret service would appreciate it if the President availed himself of foursquare.

Thinking the schedule was only available to the press, I did a little research. Sure enough, after a quick google search I was provided with the President's public schedule for February 23. It was pretty scanty and it was only his public schedule, but it was sufficiently detailed to let me know where he will be and what he will be doing for a goodly portion of his day.

It made me think ? do we have a similar expectation for our leader?

I did a quick search for PM Harper's public schedule. Couldn't find anything. No public schedule available. (Perhaps it is, but I wasn't able to find it as easily as I could find the President's). Even without this public schedule though, we know where our PM is. We have the tweets to prove it ? in two official languages no less.

What about at the municipal level? Do our fearless leaders post their daily agendas? It depends on the leader. As with all things related to Ford, there was much hue and cry about the Mayor's public schedule ? and the fact that he didn't post one. Miller had a public schedule. Tory has a public schedule. A number of other big city mayors post their schedules. As a consequence, during the Ford era there were multiple FOI requests for access to the former mayor's daily schedule.

Once the schedule was finally released, it revealed what many suspected ? or hoped for, would be a more accurate description - gaps of ?personal? time for which he refused to provide more detail.

Not to defend the ignominious Ford, but what was the purpose in accessing his schedule? Embarrassment obviously.

Perhaps Ford is not the best example of what a mayor should do, but he is a good example of the fact that a politician's day isn't 9 to 5. Regardless of his personal foibles, he must be given credit for his indefatigable responsiveness to residents' concerns regardless of the hour. A councillor's day extends well into most evenings and weekends. Answering calls. Attending events. Dealing with disputes. Public schedules don't account for that.

A Mayor is a highly public person. So is the PM. So is anyone in public office. It's not like they can play hookie?and if they do ? as the Ford debacle well demonstrated ? it will be noticed.

Besides, if you want to know where they are NOT supposed to be, well, you won't find that out by reviewing a public schedule.

Personally, I am not interested in whether our Mayor, or our MPP or our MP is at a ribbon cutting or in a staff meeting. I am interested in whether they are working hard on our behalf ? that means, do they answer my calls? Do they show up at council meetings prepared? Do they show up for votes in the House of Commons? Do they represent me and my community's best interests? If the answer is ?yes? then they are doing their job.

Until next week, stay informed, stay involved because this is ? after all ? Our Town.